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Ex-Aide Says CIA Delayed Correcting Hill Testimony

Agency Reluctance to Disclose Role in Contra Resupply Missions Is Aired at George Trial

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A former CIA official who unwittingly drafted misleading 1986 congressional testimony said yesterday that it took almost two months to get CIA superiors to correct the record after he discovered the testimony was wrong.

The errant testimony, submitted five days after a contra resupply plane was shot down over Nicaragua on Oct. 5, stated that the CIA "was not involved directly or indirectly in arranging, directing or facilitating resupply missions conducted by private individuals in support of the Nicaraguan Democratic Resistance."

The agency's reluctance to give Congress a candid accounting, just as the Iran-contra affair was beginning to unravel, was described in federal court here yesterday at the trial of Clair E. George, former chief of the CIA's clandestine service.

George has been accused of lying and obstructing congressional and grand jury investigations of the scandal, but through his lawyers he has been trying to put the blame on his chief accuser and one-time subordinate, Alan D. Fiers, former chief of the CIA's Central American Task Force.

Yesterday's testimony by Louis Dupart, who was a legislative and legal adviser to Fiers, raised questions about the credibility of both Fiers and George and the agency they served.

Called as a witness for the prosecution, Dupart said he learned the testimony was inaccurate on Nov. 6, 1986, four weeks after Fiers had him draft it for delivery by George to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the House intelligence committee.

The prosecution witness's assertions raised questions about the credibility of the defendant, his chief accuser and the CIA.

Dupart said he learned on a trip to Central America that Joseph Fernandez, the CIA's station chief in Costa Rica, had regularly shared information with members of the secret resupply effort to the Nicaraguan contras run by National Security Council staff member Lt. Col. Oliver L. North.

"I was very concerned about the facts he [Fernandez] had given me," Dupart testified. Dupart said he began pressing to set the record straight shortly after his return to Washington, but it was not until inquiries in December from House intelligence committee Chairman Lee H. Hamilton (D-Ind.) that "significant action" was taken.

Dupart said the CIA did not provide a formal report to Capitol Hill until Dec. 29, 1986. By then, the Iran-contra scandal had broken open, an independent counsel had been appointed and congressional investigations were mushrooming.

Now a deputy assistant secretary of defense, Dupart said he drafted the testimony Oct. 9 in accordance with instructions from Fiers.

"Alan called me into his office and said . . . 'We have a good story to tell. We've done a good job here.' " Dupart recalled the rule, laid down by Congress in 1984, prohibiting CIA involvement in military aid for the contra rebels. He said Fiers outlined what the statment should say, including a brief description of the evolution of the resupply network, which was based in El Salvador.

Fiers, who concluded his testimony earlier yesterday, has said he had known of Fernandez's contacts with the network since the spring of 1986, but rationalized their omission from the statement to Congress in mid-October on grounds that they were inconsequential. He said it was not until late October that he, too, had a private conversation with Fernandez and realized the extent of the CIA officer's involvement.

George has been accused of lying and obstruction for denying knowledge of individuals involved in the contra resupply network and for allegedly ordering Fiers not to mention the evolution of the network for fear it would lead to disclosure of the White House role.

Dupart's testimony showed that the agency kept hidden what it knew about the role played in North's network by Felix Rodriguez, a former CIA officer with connections to the staff of then-Vice President George Bush.

One of the principal charges against George is that he lied about the CIA's knowledge that Rodriguez was acting as North's surrogate in El Salvador under the alias of Max Gomez. Dupart said that even after George and Fiers acknowledged to Congress that Gomez and Rodriguez were the same person, they still failed to tell lawmakers in mid-October what they knew of his active participation in the resupply network, a fact that was being denied at the time by Bush and his office.